

SECTION 8  
PROCESSING &  
MARKETING

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# International Year of Natural Fibres: 2009

The United Nations has proclaimed 2009 as the International Year of Natural Fibres (IYNF). The IYNF is to be coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

Annual average world textile fibre consumption has more than tripled from 18 million tons in the 1960s to 57 million tons in the 2000s.

But consumption has evolved differently for natural and manufactured textile fibres. While the annual average consumption of natural fibres doubled from 12 million tons in the 1960s to 24 million tons in the 2000s, the annual average consumption of manufactured fibres rose five-fold from five million tons to 33 million tons. So the share of natural fibres in total textile fibre consumption fell from 71 per cent in the 1960s to 42 per cent in the 2000s.

Despite the shift, natural fibres remain a critical input to the textile industry.

### Range of fibres

There is a diverse range of natural fibres produced by farmers throughout the world, and not all of them are used in the textile industry. For some developing countries, natural fibres are of major economic

importance — especially cotton in West African countries, jute in Bangladesh and sisal in Tanzania. In other cases, these fibres are of more local importance, as is the case of jute in West Bengal (India) and sisal in north-eastern Brazil.

Cotton represents 76 per cent of the 31 million tons of natural fibre production each year, followed by jute (nine per cent), wool (seven per cent), and a number of other fibres. The average annual value of all natural fibres is US\$36 billion.

Other natural fibres include:

- Jute. Volume of production of jute is more than that of wool, but its value is just one-sixth that of wool. India and Bangladesh are the largest jute producing countries.
- Kenaf. A fibre very similar to jute, is produced in smaller quantities of around 500,000 tons per year in a number of countries, predominantly in Asia.
- Flax. Some 777,000 tons of flax fibre (linen) are produced annually, with two-thirds produced in China, and the rest in France, Russia, the Czech Republic, and Spain.
- Coir, the fibre from the husk of the coconut, is produced mainly in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.
- Silk is produced from cocoons of the silkworm and production is very labor-intensive. Main producer is China followed by India.
- Sisal, henequen and similar hard fibres are produced from the leaf of the agave plant and similar species, mainly in Africa and Latin America.
- Hemp is a bast fibre used for textiles, cordage and fine paper products with production concentrated in China and the European Union.
- Abaca is produced from the leaf stalk of a plant closely related to the banana, and is native to the Philippines. Only small quantities are now used.

### Promotional efforts

The main objective of the IYNF is to raise the profile of natural fibres, emphasising their value to consumers while helping to sustain farmers' incomes.

A complementary objective is to promote measures to improve the efficiency and sustainability of natural fibre production.

The IYNF will emphasise the environmental advantages of natural fibres over manufactured fibres, while seeking at the same time to promote the realisation of their clean potential.

Promotional events will take place around the world, including at the Plenary Meetings of the ICAC, the Milano Unica textile fair in Italy, the 10th International Cotton Conference in Poland and many other venues. The calendar of events is growing steadily, as various natural fibre groups in many countries plan their own events for the year.

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